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The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration presents the *Road to Recovery*. This program aims to raise awareness about substance use and mental health problems, highlight the effectiveness of treatment and that people can and do recover. Today's program is:

Recovery Is a Family Affair: The Complex Dynamics in Families Struggling With Mental and Substance Use Disorders

Torres: Hello, I'm Ivette Torres and welcome to another addition of *The Road to Recovery*. Today, we'll be talking about the complex family dynamics for families struggling with mental or substance use disorders.

Joining us in our panel today are: Dr. Amelia Arria, Scientific Director, Parents Translational Research Center, Treatment Research Institute, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Paolo del Vecchio, Director, Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Rockville, Maryland; Phil Mooring, Executive Director, Families in Action, Incorporated, Wilson, North Carolina; Cynthia Moreno

Tuohy, Executive Director, NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals, Washington, DC.

Paolo, why is the role of the family so important when dealing with issues of mental and substance use disorders?

del Vecchio: Well, families, Ivette, really provide that important key aspect for people to feel loved and belonged ultimately in that that's really a protective factor to help people grow and develop and live healthy, happy full lives, including addressing and helping to prevent behavioral health problems from developing in the first place.

Torres: Very good. Cynthia, today's world, there are many definitions of a family, how would you define a family nowadays?

Moreno Tuohy: You know, today, we define family in lots of different structures. It isn't just your actual blood family members. We do define it that way; however, it's who you feel connected with and who you're bonded with.

So it might be friends, it might be other people in

your community that you consider part of your family. And in fact, recently in LA, they did a family poll and they found 26 different types of family structures.

Torres: So that would include same-sex families and other dynamics where the grandmother or grandfather is the caretaker.

Moreno Tuohy: Absolutely

Torres: Very good. Amelia what are some of the most common scenarios of families facing mental or substance use disorders? What are we looking at? Is it just the parent? Is it the children? What are some of those examples?

Arria: Well, substance abuse can and mental illnesses can affect families in all different types of ways.

Sometimes, the parent is the one that's affected and has a substance use disorder, other times it's the adolescent child that begins to have drug problems. These all impact the family dynamics and all have disruptive qualities on the family.

Torres: Very good. And Phil, how could a family history of trauma affect those family dynamics?

Mooring: Well, I mean, any time you have a family that's involved in a traumatic situation we've been seeing, it seems like we've been seeing a number of those situations lately: natural disasters, violence in our culture. And if you have families who have a history of mental illness or substance use disorders, there is some vulnerability there and then on top of that you layer those things that occur that really are beyond our control. And so it increases stressors, it requires additional resources and support. So trauma can have a tremendous impact on families.

Torres: Let's expand, Paolo, though a little bit more on that.

What are some other negative consequences?

del Vecchio: There's many aspects of trauma that can occur and do occur in families and issues such as childhood abuse and neglect certainly can have a significant factor, I know for me personally. And, of course, I do identify as someone who's had mental health and substance use

problems, and we had domestic violence in my household. I know that contributed significantly to my own problems as a child, and frankly for years later. But I think the important message is that people can and do overcome these issues and can live happy and full lives.

Torres: And Cynthia, family members that are experiencing mental or substance use disorders really take a different look at how they want to approach solving those problems.

Moreno Tuohy: You're so right about that because what happens is different roles are taken on by family members. So one family member may want to be the hero and take it on and try to fix everything, and they're compulsively trying to fix things, so they don't get any relaxation themselves; they're always working to take care of the family. Whereas, someone else may say, you know, I'm done with this, I don't want to be involved, it's overwhelming, and so they avoid the situation and they move away from it.

And then another family member may call out the situation and say you all need to get some help. And the rest of the family leaves that person alone because they feel that overwhelming-ness that, oh, I can't look at this. So that's where the denial comes in is that it's a safeguard, it's a way to survive what's happening in the family. And then, some people just start acting irrelevant; they clown or they joke or they try to take the tension off the family. So there's all kinds of ways that we and family systems try to cope with what's going on in the family.

Torres: I know that I came from a family of an alcoholic father, and there was a tremendous amount of shame.

So I mean there are areas where families need to be cognizant that the children are affected tremendously.

Correct, Paolo?

del Vecchio: No question. And you know, we've come a long way in addressing what we have referred to in the past as stigma and we like to talk now about issues of prejudice and discrimination, but these attitudes are so engrained in our society and it does inhibit people

from seeking help, it inhibits families from reaching out and getting the support they need.

Sometimes, too sadly, it results in families perhaps not knowing what to do or turning their backs, sadly, on those that might have a mental health or addiction problems. And really, we need to do a lot more education of Ivette. Some of the best support are from other families. And I think the more we can build family support and parents helping other parents and families helping families, I think that will help a lot in the long run.

Torres: Phil, how do we in a family facing such issues begin to identify the right help that we need to access?

Mooring: Over my career, I have run into so many families who—
it's the not-my-child syndrome. It can't happen here,
it can't happen to me. I can't believe this is
happening. We do continue to need to get the message
out that families need to reach out. Talk within the
family, talk to your primary care doctor, talk to the
school counselors, talk to clergy.

Just start asking and inquiring and saying here's what's going on with my family, and I'm very concerned about this. Denial is what has brought so many families into my office before. So we encourage families, ask.

Torres: And when we come back, we're going to continue on the theme of how families can get help. We'll be right back.

[Music]

Male Narr: For more information on **National Recovery Month**, to find out how to get involved, or to locate an event near you, visit the **Recovery Month** website at recoverymonth.gov.

Male Narr: John Winslow, Director of the DRI-DOCK Recovery and Wellness Center in Cambridge, Maryland, talks about the mission of their organization.

Winslow: Well, the mission of the Dorchester Recovery

Initiative is to promote the personal recovery for folks no matter what path they take for their

recovery. We provide services and activities for individuals, for family members, and we look to really support the recovery efforts for the whole recovery community.

Male Narr: Joe White, peer recovery specialist at the DRI-DOCK

Recovery and Wellness Center, discusses the services

that are provided and the importance of including the
family in the recovery process.

White: We help them with transportation. We help them link up resources as far as housing, food banks, doctors.

I feel it's important to involve the whole family; therefore, they can coincide in one cohesive unit and the family can understand what that individual may be going through and be able to help them to adapt, adjust, and move on with their lives. I've had individuals come to me and say I've accomplished this, I've accomplished that, and I thank you, and I let them know you're moving forward with your life in a positive manner is thanks enough for me, you owe me no thanks. Just continue on your journey.

[Music]

Torres: Amelia, you wanted to add some thoughts.

Arria: I think that when a parent has a substance use problems there are two major areas that are impaired in terms of the parenting. One is that there are just logistical issues that aren't taken care of because the parent is more absent in the family and more preoccupied with using. The second is that the attachment between the parent and the child is often impaired as well. So you don't see the closeness and the emotional warmth that needs to develop. And together, those two things can really impact a child in a negative way, especially not only when they're young but in the teenage years when they're looking for more supports, more emotional supports.

Torres: And more structure.

Arria: And more structure.

Moreno Tuohy: One of the things I learned coming from a family of addiction, so my mother was drug addicted, my father was alcoholic, was that I learned from an early age that relationships weren't tight, you know, you didn't have that nurturing as you're talking about, you didn't have that nurturing, so that relationships as you got older were more difficult and you weren't quite sure what to do with them. And you also didn't feel respected, so your own individual feelings and thoughts weren't taken into consideration in the family.

And so that created stress, and that created some trauma for yourself. And then you carry that through into your adulthood. So it becomes multigenerational. And that's why we see families maybe not drinking the same, maybe not drugging the same, maybe not the same levels of mental illness; however, you're still seeing the same types of situations happening because we pass it down from one family generation to the next.

Torres: I would suspect, Cynthia, that it was very difficult for you to parent because in essence what happens when

you're in a household with problems is that you don't learn; you're not parented.

Moreno Tuohy: Right. Well, you do learn. You learn the things you don't want to learn. And so one of the positives about getting into the profession of addiction counseling and social work was that I had to take parenting classes to teach parenting classes and wasn't that delightful because then I began learning some things that I never knew because I didn't learn it in my family of origin. What we want families to do is to get the help that they need, so they learn them while they're in their family of origin, and they can teach them, and then the hope is that the next generation will be even better.

Torres: And Paolo, you were mentioning the whole notion of families helping other families. So talk to me a little bit about how that happens, how can other families help families that have issues of mental or substance use disorders?

del Vecchio: You know Ivette, there is nothing like talking with someone who's been in your own shoes, so to speak.

And to be able to relate to somebody who's gone through similar experiences as you, who can teach you the ropes, so to speak, who knows what services are available, how to cope, how to find information about services. Those are valuable, valuable things that other families can teach other families. Let alone, again, just the emotional support of not feeling alone with these issues and knowing that there are other people out there and being able to relate to them is crucial.

Torres: Absolutely. And Phil, in terms of getting that support, particularly for the young children, do they also, could they get support from their school systems? Are there adults that have an oversight role to be able to identify problems?

Mooring: Absolutely. We talk so much about the importance of parents talking to other parents. We believe prevention begins at the kitchen table. Parents have a vital role. Children learn so much from their parents, the messages that they get from their parents. We also know that it's very important for parents to talk to the parents of the children that

their children play with, that's a key juncture right there.

del Vecchio: As a parent myself with three young kids, I agree completely about the need to have that time at the dinner table. I read recently that said that the most important thing we can do to help prevent behavioral health problems is for everyone to have time at the dinner table alone, together as a family.

Torres: And how often does that happen now?

del Vecchio: You know, with TV and video games and things like that, but having that time together as a family unit is really important. I want to say one other thing and that's about strengths in that too often we focus on what's wrong with families. And you know, all families have strengths and we need to build on those kinds of strengths and support them based on the strengths that they have.

Moreno Tuohy: Thanks for saying that, Paolo, because sometimes we get the idea that there's bad families. There are no bad families. There's families who don't have

knowledge, there's families who don't have connection, there's families that have difficulty around addiction or mental health. But they're not bad families; they're families in trouble that need our extra attention in order to move to a more positive, nurturing family. And that's what community is about is to help cause that to happen.

Torres: And when we come back, I want to touch on what programs are available for families. We'll be right back.

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Torres: Paolo, let's talk a little bit about best practices in terms of family-centered programs. Can you provide any examples?

del Vecchio: Sure. I think one of the things that we know really works are systems-of-care approaches. Wraparound approaches that are family driven and youth guided. Those are efforts that include things like family therapy, like family-to-family peer supports that involve all aspects of systems that impact on a kid.

So those could be school systems, health care systems, sometimes criminal justice systems, juvenile justice systems as well. And a wraparound approach, the concept that it really does take a community to support a family and support a kid, and we know through research that these kinds of efforts really can help in the long run.

Torres: And Amelia, you are doing some research with families currently. Do you want to talk a little bit about that?

Arria: Sure. The Treatment Research Institute in Philadelphia is involved in designing tools and practical solutions for parents who are facing the challenge of having to select a treatment program. And even before that, we're developing tools for parents to understand how to get an assessment for their child and how they can manage the problem at home when it's less severe. But when a family is in the situation of having to select a treatment program, we have a list of questions that a parent should ask of the treatment program to make sure that it's appropriate. But I can't stress enough

the importance of understanding what the problem is and matching the treatment to the child's needs.

Torres: Phil?

Mooring: What's important for our audience to understand is that there is a great body of research now. I mean, we have years of research and we have very effective programs that are in place that really help the family move forward. I often say to a family, the person says I think my child may be using drugs or I think my child has a problem, and my response is what if you thought your child was having some heart issues, what would you do? Well, I would want to seek out the best specialist I could to find out what's going on. And that's what we say to families as well. There is help.

Torres: Cynthia, the whole notion of training the current workforce in addiction treatment, in particular that you're dealing with, to do a better job of adopting these best practices, what should families be looking for to get the best possible care from that service provider?

Moreno Tuohy: So there are specialists in addiction, so they may be a social worker, a mental health worker, or a family counselor; however, they have specialized in addiction, and so they've gone through certain academia and experience and mentoring and supervision in order to really hone their skills. So when you're looking at addictive disorders or substance use abuse you're going to want to go to somebody who is certified or licensed as a addiction specialist. you're concerned about mental health issues, you want to go to someone who has been trained and specializes in mental health. Many of us now are co-occurring; we've been trained in alcohol and drug and mental health. And so many of the community mental health centers, community alcohol drug centers, publically funded centers, there's support, often reduced fees or waived fees are available, so anyone with or without money, with or without medical insurance should be able to get some type of service. And if that service isn't available, you can go to Al Anon, which is a family self-help program, you can go to Parents Without Partners. There are many community programs where you can just begin to ask questions and start to

sort out is my family needing some extra support right now?

Torres: Yeah. Paolo, the whole notion of peer support. Is there a role for peer support within the context of a family approach to issues being faced by mental or substance use disorders?

del Vecchio: Without question. And I talked already about familyto-family types of peer support. But also, we're
seeing more and more youth being involved in helping
other youth and that kind of youth-to-youth
connection. I know for my own kids, and when I was a
teenager as well, that friends and that kind of peers
are sometimes the most important people in your life.
And so looking at ways that friends can support other
friends is really important. And again, what's key
for that is for people to be educated and informed.
The kind of tools that Amelia is developing are really
important in terms of for people to know what
resources are available out there, what's the
effectiveness of those particular approaches, so that
people can make informed decisions.

Torres: But in the peer sector, are we training peers to be able to do that, Paolo?

del Vecchio: We are. And there are many groups who are helping to do that kind of training, so that peers can help other peers, as well as training families to help other families. And through SAMHSA and other groups, we're providing support for curriculum and training, the development just to do that.

Torres: And when we come back, I want to be able to continue this topic because I think this is very important that the public understand the dynamic of what is going on. We'll be right back.

[Music]

Female VO: I felt broken. I needed help for my addiction and depression. Now, through recovery, I am rebuilding my life.

Multiple Voices: Join the Voices for Recovery. It's worth it.

Male VO: For information on prevention and treatment referral, call 1-800-662-HELP. Brought to you by the U.S.

Department of Health and Human Services.

Torres: Amelia, let's talk a little bit about the messages that parents need to be giving to their children.

Arria: I think there's a lot of research to show that parents who provide a message of disapproval and zero tolerance during the high school years are very beneficial for preventing problems later. I meet with a lot of parents who believe, mistakenly, and they have a view that is at odds with the research evidence, that say that if I teach my child how to drink responsibly when they're in high school, they won't explode when they go to college. And that's simply not true. It's over and over again we see that you can delay the initiation of alcohol problems, you will reduce the likelihood later. I think we need to make sure that the communication is still intact and

that it takes place in the context of a warm and supportive relationship with that child.

Mooring: And that research again shows that parents have the most influence on children—not athletes, not movie stars—parents have the most influence and parents have to talk to their children.

Torres: And you know, Cynthia, it brings up the point of almost saying that treatment for the caretaker and the parent is a form of prevention because once the parent becomes sober, then their child is going to have a better example, correct?

Moreno Tuohy: Exactly. So parents that get services and treatment if they have alcohol, drug, or mental health issues, they're showing an example that, yes, there is help, I can change, I will change, and should you have issues, you can get the help and change, too. The other positive things about parents getting involved in treatment early on is that it changes the dynamic in the family structure, so that the family then starts moving away from negative impactful situations to more

positive, nurturing situations. And that's what we want is long-term health and wholeness.

Torres: And as we look at some of the challenges right now, nothing can be more glaring than the experience of military families, Paolo. What are some of the issues that they face and where can they go for help?

del Vecchio: Again, my own experience, I'm the son of a Korean War vet and he never much talked about his battlefield experiences, but dealt with it through the bottle.

And for the rest of his life was an undiagnosed alcoholic and I know that had a tremendous impact on our family dynamics and my own health. And there are many, many service men and women returning from overseas and conflicts experiencing mental health and substance abuse problems.

Torres: PTSD.

del Vecchio: PTSD. One in three, it's estimated returning service men and women are coming back with PTSD. Again, the message here is that there is help that is available

in that recovery is possible and people can overcome these issues.

Torres: And Cynthia, if families cannot get the assistance they need, the courts will step in, correct?

Moreno Tuohy: Right. So there are situations with family court now, where a family court situation can step in and say there's ongoing neglect, there's ongoing abuse—we need to get the family to treatment. However, we're going to take the child out of that unsafe situation, we need to protect those children and put them in a safe home whether or not that's a foster home or some other type of protective home, whether it's a family home. Personally, I grew up in foster care, that's from my family's addiction. So it's really important nowadays that the family court system and the foster care system really looks to identify what are healthy homes, what are healthy situations, and move the child as quickly as possible back into a family situation that is healthy.

Torres: I'm going to go around the panel, and I'm going to ask you what you think ought to be the most important thing that families need to be aware of if they have an issue either with a parent or a caretaker or a child within the family that has a mental or substance use disorder.

Arria: I think often parents who have a child with a substance use problem either in the early or late stages feel very helpless and disempowered. And I think that there are many resources for those types of parents that they need to be proactive in getting those resources.

Torres: What Web page would they go to?

Arria: We're developing some tools on the Treatment Research
Institute website; the Partnership for a Drug-Free
America, now called Partnershipatdrugfree.org. We can
provide you with some of those resources. And also
they need to stay positive. I think that they can't
feel disempowered as a parent. Their role as a parent
is so key: it is the most important influence on that

kid's life, so not to give up, but they also need to be prepared.

Torres: Thanks, Amelia. Paolo?

del Vecchio: For me, I think the most important message for parents is that you're not alone. There are many other parents out there who are dealing with these issues and who have dealt successfully with them. And there are a number of groups like the Federation of Families, Al-Anon, NAMI, Active Minds on Campus, and many others that are out there that can provide that important family-to-family support.

Torres: Very good. Cynthia?

Moreno Tuohy: I think understanding what you have in your community is really important that support is there. So if you go to your county human services or your city human services department, they have a listing of all the resources that are available directly in your community, and they'll tell you what's free, they'll tell you what costs money, they'll tell you what takes insurance, so that you have choices.

Torres: Phil.

Mooring: There's no silver bullet. There's no perfect parent.

But there's a lot of help, there's a lot of support.

Parents have the most to lose. Parents have the most to lose. So we just encourage parents to be alert, be aware, be informed, but there's help available.

Torres: And I want to mention that September is National

Recovery Month. And it's a month where families and

communities can actually go out and celebrate those

that are sober, those that are in recovery from both

mental and substance use disorders and we want to

encourage you to go to our website, recoverymonth.gov,

to be able to access information about how you, too,

can become involved. I want to thank our panel. It's

been a great show. Thank you for being here.

[Music]

Male Narr: The Road to Recovery Television and Radio series educates the public about the benefits of treatment for substance use and mental health problems as well

as recovery programs for individuals, families, and communities. Each program engages a panel of experts in a lively discussion of recovery issues and successful initiatives from across the country.

To view or listen to the *Road to Recovery* Television and Radio Series from this season or previous seasons, visit recoverymonth.gov and click on the **Video**, **Radio**, **Web tab**.

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